



Advocacy and Action
for Connecticut's
Mental Health

REGION II REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH BOARD, INC.

Testimony of Kristie Barber
Executive Director, Region II Regional Mental Health Board
Co-Chair Keep the Promise (KTP)

February 23, 2017 Appropriations Public Hearing on Health
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services DMHAS & Department of Public Health DPH Budgets
Testimony on behalf of the Regional Mental Health Boards, DMHAS Budget, CLRP, and School Based Health
Clinics

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Kristie Barber, I vote in every election, I am engaged in the political process and I am grateful to have been a part of the mental health and addictions community for the past 7 years. I wish I could wave a magic wand and present you with ample funding for all of the human services in Connecticut. Unfortunately, I cannot and it will take smart strategic financial planning and collaboration between the Legislature and the Governor to really make that happen.

I OPPOSE:

1. Consolidation of the Regional Mental Health Boards and Regional Actions Councils which is really an elimination with a 1.2 million dollar reduction.
2. Reductions to Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP) which will cut their staff in half
3. Reductions to Young Adult Services in DMHAS and carrying forward \$14 million in cuts from the current FY 2017
4. School Based Health Centers Reductions

I SUPPORT:

1. Supportive Housing Dollars maintained in the DMHAS Budget – THANK YOU!

I know **what I have seen that works in mental health and addictions support and it is CHOICE for each individual, respect for the uniqueness of people and what works for their own recovery and wellness care plan.** I have seen the amazing resiliency of people and value of the support we give one another in the mental health community. Community Integration means living in the most integrated, yet independent setting for a person. Feeling a part of community and developing one's purpose is what makes us all thrive. Maintaining supportive housing is essential to the independence and success of people living in the community. You will see the Keep the Promise Coalition members here tonight, we come from different backgrounds and perspective, yet we all have a common bond and purpose to push our mental health services to a better level. **I urge you to preserve the DMHAS services that have been negatively impacted by the reductions, rescissions, and years of flat funding. DMHAS took a hit of close to 70 million dollars last year, the fallout is being felt by our communities.**

Being a leader of a Regional Mental Health Board has shown me the power of Connecticut residents having input in an organized structure that holds the service providers more accountable to the community. People with mental health struggles/conditions actively participate in the discussion and design of the feedback mechanisms to enhance and protect the system. I have seen many leaders emerge in the mental health field from the support of the Regional Mental Health Boards. We also leverage community resources to bring funds into the state and assist in reviewing state funded programs, including our current review of services at Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH).

I would support devising a similar Regional Mental Health Board system for the Children's mental health system, DCF. Our positive collaboration with DMHAS has been built over the years and is only strong because of the boards are made up of a variety of individuals who experience services, run services and influence the funding of services. **It is a model that needs to be replicated in many state funded human services.**

I do not support consolidation with the Regional Action Councils (RACS) because they have a distinctly different mission. The RACS are the link to prevention in the community and work within community structure to provide programming, assessment of youth substance use and other important work. With the drugs stronger than ever in our communities which is leading to powerful addictions and deaths, their work is essential and needs to be kept as is.

I support the work and funding of CLRP, they represent people with mental health disabilities in critical areas, housing, inpatient settings, and colleges. They succeed at the grassroots level and have supported and won every housing case that has come before them. Reductions to their housing dollars would eliminate half their staff and many people who are taken advantage of by people in housing situations would be left to fend for themselves. **Discrimination happens all the time but not with CLRP clients.**

Please also restore the funding for School Based Health Centers (SBHC), a safe haven for kids experiencing challenges, they are core social services that keep children and adolescents healthy.

I also am concerned about the conversion of state operated services to community private not profit providers. While the private sector can run services more cost effectively, this type of transition has to be amply funded so the clients will not be negatively impacted. Also, there are services that the state operated systems can provide that are not reimbursable and those services are important to support to give choice for individual recovery options.

I really appreciate your time and attention to these critical issues.

I also appreciate your dedication and expertise to put forth a budget that preserves funding for services and supports for Connecticut's resident's mental health funding.

Just Remember: You are One in a Billion!....and we need a few billion to help Connecticut's budget!